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EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**www.ijepe.com**THE NECESSITY OF IMPLEMENTING FORMAL
COUNSELLING SESSIONS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
IN IRINGA, TANZANIA**Dorothy Lubawa^{1*}, Joshua Juma Mugane²¹ Faculty of Psychology, University of Iringa, Tanzania
Email: dorothy.lubawa@uoi.ac.tz² School of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Nkumba University, Entebbe, Uganda
Email: joshuamugane6@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.955042.**This work is licensed under** [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

This study sought to examine the students' knowledge about formal counselling and issues needed to be addressed during the sessions; and determine whether implementation of formal counselling is beneficial among university students in Iringa, Tanzania. Descriptive research design and questionnaires were integrated to collect quantitative data from 292 university students, who were obtained through simple random sampling. The obtained data were then descriptively analysed using SPSS IBM Version 20 and presented in tables. The study found that formal counselling sessions need to be conducted in order to address students' cultural and gender issues, financial and economic issues, family and relationship issues, career goals and plans, and sexual health issues. It also found that formal counselling sessions assist students to resolve psychological disorders, acquire information about their gender roles and restrictions, be able to deal with relationship pressures, cultivate self-images, sharpen skills and abilities, and influence their academic achievement and career maturity. Therefore, it is concluded that formal counselling sessions should be implemented in universities so as to support students to find psychological interventions, boost their self-esteems, enrich their career paths and present themselves in acceptable manners. It is also recommended that universities should establish psychology labs or counselling facilities, employ trained therapists and encourage their students to seek counselling services, so that they may get support and solutions over their encountered distressing issues

Keywords:

Formal Counselling; Counselling Sessions; University Students; Iringa

Introduction

Educational institutions like universities, colleges, and schools contain a lot of students with diverse life issues that affect their welfare. The ongoing trends prove that some of them face financial challenges, cultural prejudice, psychological torture, sexual malpractices, and political unrests (Julal, 2013). Their prevalence has made students to be less confident with low self-esteem, have stress and anxiety disorders, and achieve poorly in academics due to truancy (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; Harding, 2011). Others are reported to engage in maladaptive behaviors like alcohol use/abuse, unsafe sexual practices and hooliganism due to wrong decisions after encountering such challenging situations or being influenced by fellow college-mates (Wegosasa, 2011; Green, & Celkan, 2014).

Dealing with such situations, it is argued that counselling services and guidance are needed to support students to realize threats and opportunities, so that they may find possible resolutions over their issues (Thuryrajah, Ahmed & Jeyakumar, 2007; Otieno & Simiyu, 2020). Such services need to be implemented in sessions under the guide of counsellors/psychologists who are well trained on how to diagnose, assess and find treatment of the identified issue. At its core, counselling services need to enable the counselee to learn, develop self-awareness, and formulate the needed types of behaviors that may help him/her to develop and grow psychologically, socially, and educationally (Egbo, 2013a; Egbo, 2013b). They should also offer a troubled person alternatives and give room of making choice (Elliott, 2011). They should furthermore adhere to ACA and APA Codes of ethics that include preservation of confidentiality, informed consent, and principles of establishing and maintaining counsellor-client relationship (Corey, 1998; Ngumi, 2005).

On the other hand, counselling services need to be done in a skilled manner. Issues like building rapport with a client, listening attentive to what the client is saying, controlling body postures and gestures, together with abandoning ruin languages should not be neglected, so as to enhance emotional welfare, body relaxation and comprehension throughout the sessions (Weaver, 1972; Ridley & Asbury, 1988; Copeland & Shearon, 1994; Sikes & Westefeld, 2003; Hornby, 2006; Yaruss, 2019).

Amidst all those facts, it is noted that the number of university students seeking counselling services is very low (Raunic & Xenos, 2008; Onditi, Ikupa & Masath, 2014). For instance, in the USA it was reported that about 2% to 4% of local and international university students bothered to seek for counselling services. Elsewhere like in Australia, university students were also found to not seek counselling services despite having threatening issues (Kambouropoulos, 2008). However, in Tanzania, students at the University of Dar es Salaam—Mwalimu Nyerere Campus were reported to have psychological disorders like stress and were not willing to seek counselling services along guidance and counselling offices (Kalonge, 2007). Based on these cases, it might be possible that university students do not consider counselling sessions as important despite having counselling and guidance departments in the respective universities (Hayes & Morgan, 2011; Eliamani, Mghweno & Baguma, 2014; Amani & Sima, 2015; Owino, 2015; Dimalaluan, Anunciado & Juan, 2017). Therefore, this study was set to investigate the necessity of implementing formal counselling sessions among university students under the following objectives:

- i. To examine the students' knowledge about formal counselling sessions and issues needed to be addressed during the sessions;

- ii. To determine whether implementation of formal counselling sessions is beneficial among university students.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed descriptive research design in order to collect data that describe students' understanding about practices and benefits of formal counselling sessions within a population of university students. That was achieved through surveys that incorporated the use of questionnaires, which intended to gather quantitative data as generated out participants' responses. Hence, it assisted the researchers to identify the study population, do sampling and generate appropriate instruments during data collection (Teegavarapu & Summers, 2008; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Area of Study

The study was carried out in Iringa region, Tanzania. This is one of the regions with well-established tertiary and higher learning institutions such as universities and colleges, which matriculate students all around Tanzania and international-wise as well. It was selected because it has university students who are likely subjected to mental health complications as brought by stress, depression, relationship breakups, achieving low grade point averages (GPAs) in their studies, thus needing counselling or psychological interventions for their wellbeing.

Population and Sample Size

University students were targeted because they are subjected to environment and risk factors that trigger their mental health status and limit them to either establish methods to cope or intervene traumatic experiences, thus eligible to confirm the necessity of implementing formal counselling sessions for their wellbeing. Amongst, simple random sampling was used to obtain a representative sample of 292 university students who participated fully out of intended sample size of 375, which was calculated using $n = N/1 + N(e)^2$ formula from estimated population (N) of 6000 students (Yamane, 1967; Singh & Masuku, 2014).

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

The obtained data were collected through the use of questionnaires that were structured in sections, which sought to capture respondents' demographic information, understanding regarding practice and benefits of formal counselling sessions and their experience in attending formal counselling sessions, thus physically shared to respondents and collected within agreed time. Thereafter, the data were quantified using descriptive analysis that was run by SPSS IBM Version 20, so as to produce frequencies, mean scores and standard deviations of results. Finally, the results are herein presented in tables that show statistical inferences and interpretations based on established scale.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through sharing the questionnaires with other experts in order to assess and evaluate their structure, content and relevancy. Also, they were translated into Swahili language that is national-wide spoken, so as to enable respondents to comprehend the items in the questionnaire and respond accordingly (Oluwatayo, 2012; Taherdoost, 2016). Finally, the results were tested and found reliable after setting cut-off point of 0.7 under Cronbach's alpha scale.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers informed the respondents about the demands and expectations of the study, then asked their consent. Those who engaged in the study were given freedom to pursue or withdraw despite the fact that they were early recruited. Also, the researchers did not pressurize respondents to fill in the gaps that they are not sure of their answers. Hence, these made the study to reach its conclusions without violence.

Results

This section presents the findings based on the research objectives in the subsequent sections. The interpretation of the presented findings is determined by the mean score variables under the scale of 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree, 1.50-2.49=Disagree, 2.50-3.49=Not Sure, 3.50-4.49=Agree, and 4.50-5.00=Strongly Agree.

Study Objective 1: To examine the students' knowledge about formal counselling and issues needed to be addressed during the sessions.

The first objective sought to examine the students' knowledge about formal counselling and issues needed to be addressed during the sessions. To answer this objective, students were given questionnaires in order to provide the intended data as subsequently presented below.

Table 1: Awareness Concerning Formal Counselling

S/N	Items in Questionnaire	Mean	St.Dev	Interpretation
1.	It requires an office or a building	4.7333	.97425	Strong Agree
2.	It is conducted by a Counsellor/ Psychologist	4.8000	.80053	Strong Agree
3.	It is practiced in our University	2.8133	.19622	Not Sure
Overall		4.1155	0.657	Agree

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that students are aware that formal counselling needs to be done in a special office or building that accommodates the counsellor and the client seeking counselling services (Mean=4.7333, $SD = .57425$). Such a response entails that students know that special office or building set for counselling services preserves confidentiality and restricts clients to access irritating environment that would limit them to openly share their concerns and get psychological help.

The findings also indicate that students are aware that formal counselling is guided by professional counsellors or psychologists who are equipped through trainings, seminars and lectures (Mean=4.8000, $SD = .80053$). Such a response entails that students consider counsellors and psychologists as experts with content and methodologies of assessing, diagnosing and treating clients based on their disorders and problems. They finally show that students are unsure whether formal counselling is practiced in their universities (Mean=2.8133, $SD = .19622$). Such a response entails that most of universities have either not established psychological labs/facilities for counselling services to their students or not employ professional counsellors/psychologists who may likely initiate and implement counselling services within the campuses.

Table 2: Issues Needed to be Addressed During Formal Counselling Sessions

S/N	Items in Questionnaire	Mean	St.Dev	Interpretation
1	Cultural and Gender issues	4.0667	.54281	Strong Agree
2	Financial and economic issues	4.8080	.84450	Strong Agree
3	Family and relationship issues	4.9600	.92564	Strong Agree
4	Peer Pressure/Mob Psychologies	4.9600	.92564	Strong Agree
5	Inferiority complexes/low self-esteem	4.9600	.92564	Strong Agree
6	Career coaching and mentorship	4.9600	.92564	Strong Agree
7	Sexual health advertisements	4.7333	.87425	Strong Agree
Overall		4.7783	.85202	Strong Agree

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that students know that formal counselling needs to be implemented in order to meet students' demands and alienate their insecurities and existential concerns. For instance, the findings describe that students need formal counselling in order to deal with cultural and gender issues (Mean=4.0667, SD= .54281), financial and economic issues (Mean=4.8080, SD= .84450) together with family and relationship issues (Mean=4.9600, SD=.92564). Such responses entail that students do face issues like gender segregation, gender-based violence, rejections based on their cultural or tribal values, family/relationship conflicts, suicidal ideation or attempts due to relationship complications, together with financial bankruptcy due to loss of financial supports, thus needing counselling sessions that would assist them to seek means of alienating them.

The findings also indicate that counselling sessions done to students need to assist them on issues related to peer pressure/mob psychology (Mean=4.9600, SD= .92564) and self-esteem (Mean=4.9600, SD= .92564). Such a response entails that students are still exposed to certain behavioural influences like alcohol and drug use/abuse, commercial-sex practices, truancy, cohabitation and theft that tentatively deteriorates their self-esteems and trigger academic progression, thus needing counselling sessions in order to reconstruct their cognitions and behaviours.

The findings furthermore indicate that university students have career goals and plans that need to be nourished through career coaching and mentorship (Mean=4.9600, SD= .92564). Such a response entails that each counselling session needs to inform students about career opportunities and expose them to different career tasks, so that they may attain career maturity and be employable after schooling. Finally, the findings indicate that counselling sessions need to advertise sexual health issues because students are exposed to uncured sexual infections/diseases like HIV/AIDS and other unsafe sexual practices (Mean=4.7333, SD= .87425).

Study Objective 2: To determine whether implementation of formal counselling is beneficial among university students

The second objective sought to determine whether implementation of formal counselling is beneficial among university students. To answer this objective, students were given questionnaires in order to provide the intended data that are presented below.

Table 3. Benefits of Implementing Formal Counselling

S/N	Item in Questionnaire	Mean	St.Dev	Interpretation
1	Helpful in increasing self-awareness among students	4.8027	.96852	Strong Agree
2	Assist students to develop problem solving skills	4.8667	.84039	Strong Agree
3	They empty out students' anxieties and attain relief	4.8960	.70567	Strong Agree
4	Handling academic challenges and career maturity	4.9173	.87575	Strong Agree
5	Assist students to develop acceptable behaviours	4.9493	.81961	Strong Agree
Overall		4.8864	.84199	Strong Agree

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that implementation of formal counselling is beneficial to university students. For instance, the findings show that formal counselling helps students to increase their self-awareness (Mean=4.8027, SD= .96852) and enable them to develop coping/problem solving skills (Mean=4.8667, SD= .84039). Such a response depicts that formal counselling is perceived to have programs that enable students to discover their identities, know their abilities and limitations, and identify possible means of dealing with distress and threats.

The findings also show that formal counselling is considered to assist students to empty out anxieties and attain relief whenever facing crisis or trauma (Mean=4.8960, SD= .70567). Such a response depicts that formal counselling assist students to alienate phobias, fears, crises, trauma and other psychological disorders that have deteriorated their mental health. They furthermore show that formal counselling is considered to help students to handle academic challenges and promote career maturity (Mean=4.9173, SD= .87575). Such a response depicts that formal counselling has programs that inform students on curriculum issues and techniques of learning, thus helpful to influence their academic achievement. They finally show that formal counselling assists students to develop acceptable behaviours (Mean=4.9493, SD= .81961). Such a response depicts that students do engage in maladaptive behaviours like unsafe sexual practices, alcohol and other drug use/abuse and cohabitation that deteriorates their welfare, thus needing formal counselling to reconstruct their cognitions and rehabilitate behavioural patterns.

Discussion

The current study revealed that most students know about formal counselling and issues needed to be addressed during the sessions. Their knowledge about formal counselling reveals it as official service that needs to be established and practiced within a building set aside as psychology lab/facility, placed under the guide of professional counsellors or psychologists who are well equipped with skills of assessing, diagnosing and developing psychotherapies. Besides that, the study revealed that formal counselling services are not well established and implemented to students despite the fact that they are being exposed to uncured sexual transmitted infections/diseases like HIV/AIDS, while having cultural and gender issues, financial and economic issues, family and relationship issues, and career goals and plans that need to be dealt out for their welfare.

Such findings are similar to those of Biswalo (1996) and Wango (2015) that call for the establishment and implementation of formal counselling among students. Arguably, formal counselling among university students should not be despised because it is helpful in resolving issues that curb their welfare (Sood, 2016). In support of the argument, Makinde (1987) and Adebowale (2012) emphasize that such formal counselling services need to be practiced within

special buildings set aside as psychology labs/facilities, having counsellors/psychologists trained as therapists who are able to assess, diagnose and find treatment through psychotherapies. For such a case, formal counselling should allow counsellors/psychologists to develop competence towards resolving students' concerns while showing them a focus or direction to follow (Shaterloo & Mohammadyar, 2011).

In similar regards, formal counselling services need to address students' cultural and gender issues, financial and economic issues, family and relationship issues, career goals and plans, and sexual health, so as to formulate possible means to overcome their threats through psychotherapies. Arguably, Frank (2021), Lubawa (2021), and Maliti, Cosmas and Lubawa (2023) similarly emphasize that formal counselling needs to have programs that will assist students to solve their psychopathologies, understand their career paths and make career choices, cope with family and relationship pressures, balance the influence from peer pressure and abandon maladaptive behaviors like alcohol abuse, unsafe sexual practices and cohabitation. Hence through such facts, students may likely experience interventions and change (Otieno & Simiyu, 2020).

On another angle, the current study revealed that formal counselling is beneficial because it helps students to increase self-awareness, develop coping/problem solving skills, empty out anxieties and attain relief, handle academic challenges, promote career maturity, and develop acceptable behaviours. Such findings are similar to those of Zunker (2002), Mwamwenda (2004), Njoka (2014), Hunga (2021) and Lubawa (2021) which reports that formal counselling sessions are helpful in resolving students' psychological disorders like anxieties and depressions, informing their gender roles and restrictions, dealing with relationship pressures, cultivating self-images, sharpening skills and abilities, and influencing academic achievement and career maturity. Hence due to such facts, formal counselling sessions are absolutely necessary and beneficial.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is revealed that formal counselling sessions need to be conducted by trained counsellors/psychologists who are able to assess, diagnose and find treatment through psychotherapies in special buildings set aside as psychology labs/facilities. The sessions have to address students' cultural and gender issues, financial and economic issues, family and relationship issues, career goals and plans, and sexual health issues, so as to formulate possible means to overcome their threats through psychotherapies. Therefore, it is concluded that formal counselling sessions should be implemented in universities so as to support students to find psychological interventions, boost their self-esteems, enrich their career paths and present themselves in acceptable manners.

Recommendations

Due to the drawn conclusion, the following are recommended:

- i. Universities should establish psychology labs or counselling facilities and implement formal counselling sessions within the campuses. This should be followed by employing well equipped counsellors/psychologists who are able to assess, diagnose and formulate treatment over identified disorders; and

- ii. University students should be encouraged to find time to seek counselling services, so that they may get support and solutions over their identified distressing issues. This should be done between professional counsellors/therapists and students, without abandoning professional ethics as stipulated in (ACA) and (APA) Codes of Ethics.

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